SŪRAH 75

Al-Qiyāmah

(The Resurrection)

Prologue

This *sūrah* puts forward such a great number of truths, scenes, images, special effects, tones and touches that no attentive heart can easily handle or escape from them. Furthermore, its distinctive style and musical cadence also combine to enhance its effect and bring it to a level that is again difficult to resist or to shed. It starts with two short verses with distinctive notes about the Day of Resurrection and the self-reproaching soul: "*I need not swear by the Day of Resurrection and I need not swear by the self-reproaching soul!*" (Verses 1–2) The *sūrah* then continues with a discourse that from start to finish relates to both the human soul and the Day of Resurrection, often coupling them together. It is as if the opening two verses sum up the subject matter of the whole *sūrah*, or that they set the tone influencing its notes in a fine and beautiful way.

One of the great truths the *sūrah* speaks about is death. The reality of how death applies to every living creature, and from which none can escape or divert it from a loved one is a hard truth. It occurs at every moment, and is applicable to young and old, rich and poor, strong and weak alike. All stand in the same position: there is no escape, no evasion, no resistance, no intercession and no deferment. This suggests that death comes from a higher source, one mankind cannot influence in any way. When it occurs, man simply submits to this higher source.

This is the note with which the *sūrah* takes hold of our hearts: "*Yet when the departing soul comes up to the throat, when it is said, 'Can any charmer [do something now]?' When he knows it is the final parting, and one leg will be joined with another, to your Lord he will on that day be driven.*" (Verses 26–30)

Another great truth highlighted in the *sūrah* is how man comes into existence in the first place, and its significance in confirming the truth of resurrection. In this way we see how man's creation occurs according to careful planning. God informs people of the fine stages of their coming into existence, and how these stages succeed one another in such a marvellous procession that only He could have designed. Indeed, even those who deny the resurrection do not claim a different origin for this process. This, in itself, provides irrefutable evidence of the presence of the One God, who deals death and determines its timing. Moreover, death provides clear evidence that resurrection is easy, and also implies that it is necessary. It is, thus, seen as being consistent with the planning whereby man has a clear purpose, and that his life does not end without him accounting for his deeds. This is the note that touches hearts at the beginning of the *sūrah*: "*Does man think that We will not put his bones together again?*" (Verse 3) As it draws to its end, the *sūrah* says: "*Does man think that he will be left without purpose? Was he not a mere drop of emitted sperm? It then became a clinging cell mass, and then God created and shaped it, fashioning out of it the two sexes, male and female. Is He not, then, able to bring the dead back to life?*" (Verses 36–40)

One of the scenes the *sūrah* paints is that of the Day of Resurrection and the great celestial events that take place on that day. In this, we see the psychological upheaval that leaves man at a loss, unable to decide how to face these events. Thus, the great upheaval occurs in the centre of the universe, as well as in the very depths of the human soul, leaving man like a mouse in a trap. This comes in response to man as he wonders, with much doubt, about whether the Day of Resurrection will ever come. In so doing, he treats it with carelessness, persisting in his erring ways. God's response to all this is delivered with a quick rhythm, one that paints a fast succession of images and glimpses: "*Yet man wants to deny what lies ahead of him. He asks: 'When will this Day of Resurrection be?' When the sight is dazzled and the moon eclipsed, when the sun and the*

moon are brought together, on that day man will say: 'Where to flee?' But no! There is no refuge. On that day, to your Lord all shall return. Man will be told on that day all that he put forward and all that he put back. Man will be a witness against himself, even though he may put up his excuses." (Verses 5–15)

One of these images is that of the believers, with full trust in their Lord, looking up to His benevolent face in the midst of all this horror. Another image is of those on the other side, who have no bond with their Lord and no hope of His grace. These expect to receive what their earlier denials, disbelief and disobedience entail. This image is presented forcefully, as if it is taking place at the very moment the *sūrah* is being recited. It responds to people's love of this present world and their disregard of the life to come: "*Yet you love this fleeting life, and give no thought to the life to come. Some faces will on that day be radiant with happiness, looking towards their Lord; and some faces will on that day be overcast with despair, realizing that a great calamity is about to befall them.*" (Verses 20–25)

Four verses interrupt this sequence of truths to deliver a special directive to the Prophet concerning the way he receives Qur'ānic revelations. It would also appear that this directive relates to something in particular about this *sūrah*. The Prophet had feared that he might forget something of what was being revealed to him, and in his eagerness to ensure that he did not forget, he used to repeat its verses, one by one, as they were recited to him. He would vocalize the words to make sure that he learnt them by heart. Therefore, he was given the following instruction: "*Do not move your tongue repeating its words in haste. We shall see to its collection and recitation. When We recite it, follow its recitation. Then it will be for Us to make its meaning clear.*" (Verses 16–19) This instruction is given to the Prophet to reassure him that the revelation of the Qur'ān, its preservation, collection and explanation of its message are left to the Almighty, the Author of the Qur'ān. The Prophet's own role is to receive the message and deliver it as he receives it. Therefore, he need not worry. He should receive the revelation in full and then he will find it engraved in his heart without change. This was exactly what happened. This instruction, however, has been retained at the precise point where it occurred. Is it not given in God's own words? God's word is sure to stay in place, whatever purpose it addresses. These four verses,

therefore, represent words He said, and therefore, they stay in His book like the rest of it. In fact, retaining these four verses in the middle of the *sūrah* points to an inspiring truth concerning all God's words, whatever their purpose happens to be. It tells us that every word God said to His Messenger, Muḥammad (peace be upon him), has been recorded; not a single letter has been lost.

As it listens to this *sūrah*, the human heart realizes that there is no escape. Man will have to account for his deeds, with no one to protect him from God. His existence, in both this life and the life to come, is determined by God, according to His knowledge and planning. Meanwhile, man plays around and thinks himself too important: "*He neither believed nor prayed, but denied the truth and turned away, then he went back to his people full of arrogance.*" (Verses 31–33) As he faces this large number of truths, images and special effects, man is given an implicit but highly effective warning: "*Your doom, man, comes nearer and nearer, and ever nearer and nearer.*" (Verses 34–35)

We see how the *sūrah* deals with man's obstinate rejection of the divine message, making him feel, in all clarity, the seriousness of its discourse about resurrection, the human soul and the accurate measure of life. It tells him that the Qur'ān is also a very serious matter: not a single letter of it will ever be lost because it is all God's own words.

We have thus outlined the truths and images presented in the *sūrah* individually, but when these are read in the *sūrah* itself and as a whole they give a totally different effect. The sequence of these images, the way they are intertwined, and their presentation of an aspect of the truth at one time and then giving another aspect of it a little later are all characteristics of the Qur'ān's inspiring style as it addresses the human heart. No other style or method could possibly achieve a similar effect.

Al-Qiyāmah
(The Resurrection)

In the Name of God, the Lord of Grace, the Ever Merciful

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَٰنِ الرَّحِيمِ

I need not swear by the Day of Resurrection (1)

لَا أُقْسِمُ بِيَوْمِ الْقِيَامَةِ ﴿١﴾

and I need not swear by the self-reproaching soul! (2)

وَلَا أُقْسِمُ بِالنَّفْسِ اللَّوَّامَةِ ﴿٢﴾

Does man think that We will not put his bones together again? (3)

أَيَحْسَبُ الْإِنسَانُ أَلَّن نَّجْمَعَ عِظَامَهُ ﴿٣﴾

Yes, indeed! We are able to put in perfect order his very fingertips! (4)

بَلَىٰ قَادِرِينَ عَلَىٰ أَن نُّسَوِّيَ بَنَانَهُ ﴿٤﴾

Yet man wants to deny what lies ahead of him. (5)

بَلْ يُرِيدُ الْإِنسَانُ لِيَفْجُرَ أَمَامَهُ ﴿٥﴾

He asks: 'When will this Day of Resurrection be?' (6)

يَسْأَلُ أَيَّانَ يَوْمُ الْقِيَامَةِ ﴿٦﴾

When the sight is dazzled (7)

فَإِذَا بَرِقَ الْبَصَرُ ﴿٧﴾

and the moon eclipsed, (8)

وَخَسَفَ الْقَمَرُ ﴿٨﴾

when the sun and the moon are brought together, (9)

وَجُمِعَ الشَّمْسُ وَالْقَمَرُ ﴿٩﴾

يَقُولُ ٱلْإِنسَٰنُ يَوْمَئِذٍ أَيْنَ ٱلْمَفَرُّ ﴿١٠﴾

on that day man will say: 'Where to flee?' (10)

كَلَّا لَا وَزَرَ ﴿١١﴾

But no! There is no refuge. (11)

إِلَىٰ رَبِّكَ يَوْمَئِذٍ ٱلْمُسْتَقَرُّ ﴿١٢﴾

On that day, to your Lord all shall return. (12)

يُنَبَّؤُا۟ ٱلْإِنسَٰنُ يَوْمَئِذٍۭ بِمَا قَدَّمَ وَأَخَّرَ ﴿١٣﴾

Man will be told on that day all that he put forward and all that he put back. (13)

بَلِ ٱلْإِنسَٰنُ عَلَىٰ نَفْسِهِۦ بَصِيرَةٌ ﴿١٤﴾

Man will be a witness against himself, (14)

وَلَوْ أَلْقَىٰ مَعَاذِيرَهُۥ ﴿١٥﴾

even though he may put up his excuses. (15)

لَا تُحَرِّكْ بِهِۦ لِسَانَكَ لِتَعْجَلَ بِهِۦٓ ﴿١٦﴾

Do not move your tongue repeating its words in haste. (16)

إِنَّ عَلَيْنَا جَمْعَهُۥ وَقُرْءَانَهُۥ ﴿١٧﴾

We shall see to its collection and recitation. (17)

فَإِذَا قَرَأْنَٰهُ فَٱتَّبِعْ قُرْءَانَهُۥ ﴿١٨﴾

When We recite it, follow its recitation. (18)

ثُمَّ إِنَّ عَلَيْنَا بَيَانَهُۥ ﴿١٩﴾

Then it will be for Us to make its meaning clear. (19)

كَلَّا بَلْ تُحِبُّونَ ٱلْعَاجِلَةَ ﴿٢٠﴾

Yet you love this fleeting life, (20)

and give no thought to the life to come. (21)

وَتَذَرُونَ ٱلْآخِرَةَ ﴿٢١﴾

Some faces will on that day be radiant with happiness, (22)

وُجُوهٌ يَوْمَئِذٍ نَّاضِرَةٌ ﴿٢٢﴾

looking towards their Lord; (23)

إِلَىٰ رَبِّهَا نَاظِرَةٌ ﴿٢٣﴾

and some faces will on that day be overcast with despair, (24)

وَوُجُوهٌ يَوْمَئِذٍ بَاسِرَةٌ ﴿٢٤﴾

realizing that a great calamity is about to befall them. (25)

تَظُنُّ أَن يُفْعَلَ بِهَا فَاقِرَةٌ ﴿٢٥﴾

Yet when the departing soul comes up to the throat, (26)

كَلَّآ إِذَا بَلَغَتِ ٱلتَّرَاقِيَ ﴿٢٦﴾

when it is said, 'Can any charmer [do something now]?' (27)

وَقِيلَ مَنْ ۜ رَاقٍ ﴿٢٧﴾

When he knows it is the final parting, (28)

وَظَنَّ أَنَّهُ ٱلْفِرَاقُ ﴿٢٨﴾

and one leg will be joined with another, (29)

وَٱلْتَفَّتِ ٱلسَّاقُ بِٱلسَّاقِ ﴿٢٩﴾

to your Lord he will on that day be driven. (30)

إِلَىٰ رَبِّكَ يَوْمَئِذٍ ٱلْمَسَاقُ ﴿٣٠﴾

He neither believed nor prayed, (31)

فَلَا صَدَّقَ وَلَا صَلَّىٰ ﴿٣١﴾

but denied the truth and turned away, (32)	وَلَٰكِن كَذَّبَ وَتَوَلَّىٰ ﴿٣٢﴾
then he went back to his people full of arrogance. (33)	ثُمَّ ذَهَبَ إِلَىٰ أَهْلِهِ يَتَمَطَّىٰ ﴿٣٣﴾
Your doom, man, comes nearer and nearer, (34)	أَوْلَىٰ لَكَ فَأَوْلَىٰ ﴿٣٤﴾
and ever nearer and nearer. (35)	ثُمَّ أَوْلَىٰ لَكَ فَأَوْلَىٰ ﴿٣٥﴾
Does man think that he will be left without purpose? (36)	أَيَحْسَبُ الْإِنسَانُ أَن يُتْرَكَ سُدًى ﴿٣٦﴾
Was he not a mere drop of emitted sperm? (37)	أَلَمْ يَكُ نُطْفَةً مِّن مَّنِيٍّ يُمْنَىٰ ﴿٣٧﴾
It then became a clinging cell mass, and then God created and shaped it, (38)	ثُمَّ كَانَ عَلَقَةً فَخَلَقَ فَسَوَّىٰ ﴿٣٨﴾
fashioning out of it the two sexes, male and female. (39)	فَجَعَلَ مِنْهُ الزَّوْجَيْنِ الذَّكَرَ وَالْأُنثَىٰ ﴿٣٩﴾
Is He not, then, able to bring the dead back to life? (40)	أَلَيْسَ ذَٰلِكَ بِقَادِرٍ عَلَىٰ أَن يُحْيِيَ الْمَوْتَىٰ ﴿٤٠﴾

Self-Reproaching Soul

> *I need not swear by the Day of Resurrection and I need not swear by the self-reproaching soul! Does man think that We will not put his bones together again? Yes, indeed! We are able to put in perfect order his very fingertips! Yet man wants to deny what lies ahead of him. He asks: 'When will this Day of Resurrection be?' When the sight is dazzled and the moon eclipsed, when the sun and the moon are brought together, on that day man will say: 'Where to flee?' But no! There is no refuge. On that day, to your Lord all shall return. Man will be told on that day all that he put forward and all that he put back. Man will be a witness against himself, even though he may put up his excuses.* (Verses 1–15)

The *sūrah* starts with a reference to making an oath, but then decides not to make it. This has a deeper effect than a straightforward oath, and this is what is intended. Indeed, a more literal rendering would be: 'I do not swear by...' When this has been stated, the truths of the resurrection and self-reproaching soul appear in view.

There is much discussion of resurrection in the *sūrah*. As for the self-reproaching soul, various reports explain this. Al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī says: "You will always find a believer questioning himself: 'What did I mean by this word? What did I eat this food for? What do I mean by speaking to myself thus?' A transgressor will go on never blaming himself." Al-Ḥasan says: "Every single soul in the heavens and earth will be blaming himself on the Day of Judgement." 'Ikrimah says: "It is the soul that blames itself for good and bad things, saying: if only I did this or that." Sa'īd ibn Jubayr said the same. Ibn 'Abbās says: "It is always blaming." He also says: "It is often blaming, much criticized." Mujāhid says: "It regrets what has passed and blames for it." Qatādah says: "It is the one tending towards evil." Jarīr says: "All these definitions are in practically the same vein. However, what is closer to the apparent meaning of the Qur'ānic statement is to say that it is the soul that blames a person for whatever he does, good or bad, and regrets what has passed." For our self, we prefer the first definition stated by al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī.

Such a pious, self-reproaching soul, one that fears God's punishment, and is always cautious, looking around, reviewing its actions, identifying

what it desires, making sure not to cheat itself, is certainly so honoured by God as to warrant mention alongside the Day of Resurrection. It is the opposite of the soul of one who wants to indulge in sin undeterred; who lies, turns away from the truth and then returns to his people full of arrogance, never taking stock of his actions and paying no heed to the truth.

"*I need not swear by the Day of Resurrection and I need not swear by the self-reproaching soul!*" (Verses 1–2) What is at the centre of this opening is the arrival of the Day of Resurrection, but when the oath is left aside, the *sūrah* does not mention the subject of that oath further. Instead, it picks it up in another form, as if to start a discourse having alerted our minds to it with this clear opening: "*Does man think that We will not put his bones together again? Yes, indeed! We are able to put in perfect order his very fingertips!*" (Verses 3–4)

The essential difficulty for the unbelievers was that they could not imagine that bones becoming dust and being swallowed by the earth could then be gathered together again to bring a human being back to life. This is also most probably true of some people today! The *sūrah* responds to this sort of thinking, confirming that putting everyone's bones back together will assuredly take place: "*Yes, indeed! We are able to put in perfect order his very fingertips!*" (Verse 4) The *sūrah* reasserts this process of putting bones back together by stating something more complex, which is to put fingertips in their respective positions, just as they were in life. This implies that man will be brought back to life, with every little detail or small aspect of his physique put back in perfect order. Nothing is lost, however small!

This reconfirmation is enough here. Towards the end of the *sūrah*, we have another proof derived from the fact of man's first creation. Here, however, the *sūrah* exposes the mental flaw leading to this sort of thinking that cannot conceive of bones being put back together. Man simply wants to persist in his denial so that he goes on the loose, with nothing to check or restrain his march. He does not want to face any reckoning or requital. Therefore, he expects no resurrection and no answerability: "*Yet man wants to deny what lies ahead of him. He asks: 'When will this Day of Resurrection be?'*" (Verses 5–6) This question is stated in the Arabic with the interrogative pronoun *ayyāna*, which

adds to the normal equivalent of 'when', which is *ayna*, the doubling of the '*y*' sound and a long '*a*'; a form that suggests the improbability of happening. This is in line with the desire of the questioner to run loose and continue with his sinful ways, undeterred by any thought of the hereafter. Indeed, the hereafter often acts as a restraint checking the desire to indulge in sin. Now this person tries to remove this restraint so that he can go ahead with sinful practices undeterred.

The answer that comes is swift, decisive, maintains a fast beat and uses hard-hitting words. It draws a scene of the Day of Resurrection in which human senses and feelings combine with celestial images to produce an awesome effect: "*When the sight is dazzled and the moon eclipsed, when the sun and the moon are brought together, on that day man will say: 'Where to flee?'*" (Verses 7–10) The sight is very swiftly distracted here and there, like lightning, and the moon is eclipsed and no longer reflects any light, while the sun and the moon are brought together after they have long been parted. Their familiar operation is disrupted since the entire celestial system, known for its accuracy of movement, is no longer operating. In the midst of all this upheaval, man stands terrified, asking, 'Where to flee?' The very question imparts a feeling of fear and utter panic. Man looks lost, wherever he turns his eyes he sees nothing but a blocked way.

There is no refuge or protection. No one can avert God's power and punishment, since all return to Him and there is no hiding place to seek other than the one He determines: "*But no! There is no refuge. On that day, to your Lord all shall return.*" (Verses 11–12) So what man has desired, hoping to be able to continue with his erring ways, fearing neither reckoning nor requital, is not what happens. On the contrary, everything will be reckoned, and he will be reminded of anything he may have forgotten. It will all be brought before him so that he faces his fair requital: "*Man will be told on that day all that he put forward and all that he put back.*" (Verse 13) He will be told of what he did before his death, as also what effects his actions produced after his death, whether good or evil. Some actions produce long-lasting effects, and these effects are added to the account of the person who performed them.

Whatever excuses man may try to put forward, none will be accepted. He is responsible for himself, and it is his duty to bring himself to divine

guidance. When he let himself sink into evil, only he himself can be answerable for this: "*Man will be a witness against himself, even though he may put up his excuses.*" (Verses 14–15)

It is worth noting here that every expression in the *sūrah* thus far is short and quick: the verses, the endings, the rhythm, the images and the reckoning process. This appears to be a response to man's attempt to disregard the whole idea of the Day of Reckoning and to think that it is too far off.

God's Guarantee

Then come the four verses giving the Prophet special instruction as regards the way he received Qur'ānic revelations:

> *Do not move your tongue repeating its words in haste. We shall see to its collection and recitation. When We recite it, follow its recitation. Then it will be for Us to make its meaning clear.* (Verses 16–19)

In addition to what we have already said about these four verses in the Prologue, we note that God takes all responsibility for the Qur'ān: its revelation, preservation, collection and explanation. All this is undertaken by none other than God Almighty. The Prophet's role is no more than to receive and deliver it. We also note here how the Prophet was so eager and keen to fully understand what was being revealed to him, taking it most seriously, fearing to forget a phrase or a word. Hence why he repeated the words after the Angel Gabriel recited them to him, to make sure that he had not omitted any of it. The fact that this is recorded in the Qur'ān itself further emphasizes what we have just said.

Opposite Positions

The *sūrah* now reminds the unbelievers of their love of this present world, which is their main concern, and their disregard of the hereafter. It shows them the state in which they will end up in the life to come in a highly inspiring image:

Yet you love this fleeting life, and give no thought to the life to come. Some faces will on that day be radiant with happiness, looking towards their Lord; and some faces will on that day be overcast with despair, realizing that a great calamity is about to befall them. (Verses 20–25)

The first thing we notice, which adds to the harmony of style, is that this life is described at this point as '*fleeting*'. This not only stresses the short duration of this present life, which is the intended meaning, but also provides an element of harmony between these connotations and those of the preceding verses speaking of the Prophet as he repeated the words of the Qur'ān. In both, haste is a common feature. It also appears to be a feature of mankind in this present world.

These last quoted verses paint two contrasting images: "*Some faces will on that day be radiant with happiness, looking towards their Lord.*" (Verses 22–23) This is a very quick reference to a situation no words can describe and no imagination can fully understand. Those people are promised a kind of happiness that is unlike any other. Indeed, heaven and all the happiness it includes appear too small by comparison. These beaming faces are so radiant with happiness because they are looking towards their Lord! They are looking towards God! How sublime! What pure, perfect and absolute happiness!

Sometimes man's soul looks briefly at an aspect of beauty God has placed in the universe or within man. It may see this in the full moon, the still night, the breaking dawn, the stretching shadow, the bustling sea, the endless desert, the blossoming garden, the happy face, the noble heart, the unshakable faith, the unwavering patience or many other manifestations of beauty in this world. Looking at such beauty, man feels ecstatic, flowing with happiness, flying into a world of light and purity. All adversity seems to shrink and disappear. So how will man's soul feel when he looks, not at the beauty of God's creation, but at God's own beauty? This is a position that needs both help and reassurance from God so that man can steady himself and begin to enjoy such indescribable happiness: "*Some faces will on that day be radiant with happiness, looking towards their Lord.*" (Verses 22–23) How could these faces be anything but radiant and beaming when they are looking towards their Lord and His beauty?

We experience a feeling of happiness that rises from our hearts and gives our faces a beaming look, simply because we see the beauty of something God has created: a bright face, a lovely flower, a spread-out wing, a noble soul or a kindly deed. What feelings, then, will overwhelm us when we look at the beauty of perfection, and when we are free of all life's concerns that may distract us from appreciating such beauty? When we speak of 'life's concerns' we do not mean only in the world around us but also in terms of our own shortcomings and needs.

How do those happy people look; with what organ and by what means? These are questions that do not even occur to a heart touched by the happiness that this Qur'ānic statement radiates into a believer's soul. Why, then, do some people deprive their souls from enjoying this light that overflows with happiness and joy? Why do they, instead, get involved in futile arguments about an abstract that human minds, restricted as they are by their familiar world, cannot fathom? Only man's release from the shackles of his worldly existence will give him the hope of facing the absolute truth on the Day of Resurrection. Without such release, man cannot even imagine what facing that truth will be like.

This means that the seemingly endless arguments the Mu'tazilah entered into with their Sunnī theological opponents and other philosophers were absolutely futile, leading nowhere. They argued about the nature of 'the look' and 'the sight' on that day. They used earthly standards, speaking about encumbered man, man restricted by what he knows when on earth, and so looked at the whole question with faculties that are essentially limited in scope.

The very import of the words is restricted by what our finite minds and imaginations understand. If our minds are freed from such restrictions, the very words may acquire different meanings. Words are only symbols, and what they symbolize differs in accordance with man's thoughts and concepts. When man's powers and faculties change, his concepts change and, consequently, the significance of words change. In our life on earth, we deal with these symbols according to our power. Why, then, should we argue about something when we are not even sure about the significance of the words expressing it? Let us, then, look up to this absolutely serene happiness and pure joy which we feel when we try, as we can, to imagine that position. Let our souls revel in that

happiness, for the mere looking up to such happiness is a great blessing of far-reaching dimensions.

"*And some faces will on that day be overcast with despair, realizing that a great calamity is about to befall them.*" (Verses 24–25) These are faces looking absolutely grim, with their sins and misdeeds casting a dark shadow over them. Their expectation of an impending calamity that crushes their very backbones weighs heavily on them and heightens their immense sorrow. How dreadful and ghastly they look!

Such is the life to come which they ignore, preferring to indulge in this life of fleeting pleasures. They love this life despite having ahead of them that day which brings widely different fates.

The Scene of Death

The scenes painted so far of the Day of Judgement and its great upheavals and divergent fates derive their effect from the truth they represent and the Qur'ān's own powerful style, bringing them alive before us. The *sūrah* now comes closer and closer so as to present a scene of something that occurs all the time. Indeed, people encounter this most clearly at every moment in their lives. It is the scene of death that overtakes every living soul. No one can evade or escape death, which separates a person from his loved ones. Death moves along its course, uninterrupted by anything. It does not respond to an impassioned appeal, an outcry of grief, a fervent desire or a seizure of panic. It takes the most powerful giants as easily as it takes the weakest dwarfs, and overcomes tyrants in the same way as it overcomes the oppressed. Mankind have no way to prevent death, yet they do not consider the great power that deals it:

> *Yet when the departing soul comes up to the throat, when it is said, 'Can any charmer [do something now]?' When he knows it is the final parting, and one leg will be joined with another, to your Lord he will on that day be driven.* (Verses 26–30)

This is the scene of approaching death, presented to people by the Qur'ān as if it is happening now. It comes out from within the words, just like a picture comes out of a painter's brush.

"*Yet when the departing soul comes up to the throat.*" (Verse 26) At this point the dying person is in his last throes, with distress all around. Those present look everywhere, trying to think of something or some means to save the one suffering this distress: "*when it is said, 'Can any charmer [do something now]?'*" (Verse 27) Could a charm possibly be of any use? The suffering one is writhing with pain, "*and one leg will be joined with another.*" (Verse 29) All means are of no use. The road ahead becomes clear; it is the road every living being will eventually have to walk: "*To your Lord he will on that day be driven.*" (Verse 30) The scene almost moves in front of us and almost talks. Every verse draws a movement, and the image of approaching death is clearly visible spreading impassioned feelings of loss and panic, before facing the bitter, hard truth no one can escape from. The inevitable end then clearly appears: "*To your Lord he will on that day be driven.*" (Verse 30) The curtains are drawn over this distressing scene, leaving a distinct image in our eyes, prominent feelings in our hearts and a clear sense of grimness in the air.

Arrogant Rejection

By contrast, we have an image of those bent on denying the truth. They do not prepare for the inevitable end by doing something in obedience of God. Rather, they arrogantly indulge in disobedience and sin:

> *He neither believed nor prayed, but denied the truth and turned away, then he went back to his people full of arrogance.* (Verses 31–33)

It is reported that these verses refer to a particular person, Abū Jahl 'Amr ibn Hishām, who used to visit the Prophet sometimes and listen to the Qur'ān. He would then go away, refusing to believe. In fact, he was neither polite nor fearful of God. He would continue to hurt the Prophet by what he said, and would try to turn people away from Islam. He would also take pride in such actions, treating his evil deeds as something to be proud of. The Qur'ān derides his attitude. In its description of his arrogant movements, it invites the listeners' scorn.

Yet there are many like Abū Jahl whom the message of Islam faces. They listen but turn away. They are inventive in their opposition to the word of truth, pouring harm on its advocates, working out evil schemes and feeling proud of their evil deeds and of the corruption they spread on earth. Hence, the Qur'ān issues a clear threat to such people:

> *Your doom, man, comes nearer and nearer, and ever nearer and nearer.* (Verses 34–35)

The *sūrah* uses here an idiom, *awlā laka fa 'awlā*, which implies a strong threat and repeats it twice. Hence the translation expresses the implied meaning. On one occasion, the Prophet held Abū Jahl by the scruff of his neck and used this expression as it occurs in the *sūrah*. Abū Jahl said: "Are you threatening me, Muḥammad? By God, neither you nor your Lord can do anything to me. I am the most powerful man ever to walk in between these hills." When the Battle of Badr took place, God killed him by the hands of Muḥammad's followers. Before him, Pharaoh said to the chiefs of his people: "*Nobles! I know of no deity that you could have other than myself.*" (28: 38) He also said: "*My people, is the kingdom of Egypt not mine, with all these rivers flowing at my feet?*" (43: 51) Yet God smote him down, drowned him.

The history of the divine message is full of people who forgot God and His power, of those who feel their own power, relying on tribes, forces and authority, thinking that all these will give them protection. Then such people are taken away like a fly or a mosquito. Remember then, when the time of death comes it cannot be put forward or backward by even a fraction of a second.

Can it be Without Purpose?

As the *sūrah* draws to its conclusion, it presents another truth from this world that carries a clear pointer to God's design of human life as also to the life to come:

> *Does man think that he will be left without purpose? Was he not a mere drop of emitted sperm? It then became a clinging cell mass, and*

then God created and shaped it, fashioning out of it the two sexes, male and female. Is He not, then, able to bring the dead back to life? (Verses 36–40)

This last section strikes powerful notes and points to great truths, which those who were addressed by the Qur'ān at the time of its revelations could never imagine. The first of these refers to the deliberate design and planning in man's life: "*Does man think that he will be left without purpose?*" (Verse 36) Those people used to think that life was merely a process that takes place, having neither cause nor goal. Women get pregnant and give birth, and graves take the dead away! In between, there is nothing other than idle play, putting on some adornments, competing for good things, and enjoyment that is not much different from animals. To think that it all goes according to an elaborate law, serving a definite goal and purpose; that man's arrival in this life is according to a deliberate will and a set plan; that it all ends with accountability and requital, and that the journey of life is a test before the final requital was far beyond people's thoughts. Few could recognize in all this the wisdom of God, that He does everything for a clear purpose and towards a pre-willed end.

What distinguishes man from animals is man's recognition of the link between time, events and objectives and that human life has a definite purpose linked to that of the universe around him. The greater and broader this feeling is in man's consciousness and the more refined is his concept of the law that links things and events, the higher he rises in his humanity. Thus, he does not live his life one minute or one event after another. On the contrary, time, place, the past, present and future are all connected in his consciousness. They are all related to the existence of the great universe and its laws. These are the result of a higher will that creates, plans and designs. This higher will does not create people and leave them to a life without purpose.

The Qur'ān put this profound concept in people's minds so long ago. It was a great departure from the concepts that prevailed at the time. It remains greatly removed from all concepts about the universe that philosophers of olden and modern times have advanced.

"*Does man think that he will be left without purpose?*" (Verse 36) This is a fine touch, which the Qur'ān uses to alert the human mind to think and reflect, looking at bonds, goals, causes and effects that link his existence to that of the universe and to the will that conducts everything in that universe.

In a clear and simple manner, the *sūrah* cites clear evidence confirming that man will not be left without purpose. These are taken from man's first origins: "*Was he not a mere drop of emitted sperm? It then became a clinging cell mass, and then God created and shaped it, fashioning out of it the two sexes, male and female.*" (Verses 37–39) What is man? How does he come into existence? What are his origins? How does he grow into his present status? What journey did he make before arriving on this planet? Was he not a mere drop of a certain emitted fluid? Did not this one-celled drop transform into a cell mass that clung to the wall of the uterus to survive and be nourished? Who guided it to do this, and who gave it this ability?

Then again, who made out of it an embryo with perfectly shaped organs, composed of millions and millions of cells, when it only originated as a single cell that fertilized an egg? Its journey from one cell to a fully-shaped embryo is far longer than man's journey from birth to death. The changes and transformations it goes through during the embryonic journey are much more varied and wider than all that a man encounters through his life journey from the moment of birth to the moment of death. Who guided his long eventful journey while he was a helpless creature without an intellect, perception and experience?

Ultimately, who brought out of the single cell the two types, male and female? What will did this cell have to develop into a male while the other developed into a female? Or, who indeed can claim to have intervened to guide their different routes to make this choice in the dark depths of the uterus?

There is no escape! Everyone admits the presence of the gentle hand that guided the emitted drop of fluid along its long way and brought it to its final shape, according to an elaborate plan: "*Fashioning out of it the two sexes, male and female.*" (Verse 39)

As this truth imposes itself on our human senses, the *sūrah* concludes with a note that brings together the truths outlined through its verses:

"*Is He not, then, able to bring the dead back to life?*" (Verse 40) Yes, indeed! God Almighty is able to bring the dead back to life. Yes, indeed! Limitless is He in His glory, God is able to bring about the second life. Yes, without doubt. Man can say nothing to this, other than submit to its truth.

Thus the *sūrah* concludes, with such a powerful and decisive note that allows the truth of human existence and the elaborate planning behind it to fill our minds.